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ABSTRACT

One purpose of this project was to develop positive attitudes and knowledge of evaluation philosophy and techniques at the local building level. A set of procedures and instruments was devised through the efforts of the project staff to train participants to plan and carry out activities appropriate for assessing the particular educational needs in their school. Evaluation activities were implemented by a building committee formed in each elementary school in conjunction with project staff. A reading assessment instrument was provided as a basis for the committee to plan the evaluation. The six sections contained in the instrument were designed to aid the collection of information concerning student performance, teacher and administrator strengths and weaknesses, adequacy of instruction materials, and parental influences in the reading program. The results of the first year procedure indicated that the section of the reading instrument concerning teacher strengths and weaknesses was useful to administrations in planning for staff development programs. Also, in schools where comprehensive evaluations based on the suggestions from the student strength and weakness section were planned, a great amount of time and thinking were required to collect data relevant to their question. (WR)

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COLUMBUS PUBLIC SCHOOLS

DEPARTMENT OF EVALUATION, RESEARCH AND PLANNING

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A Report on

Elementary School Curriculum

Reading

Project PRIMES:
Progress Research in Meeting Elementary Standard
ESEA Title III
1972-73

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SECTION I - Specifications of the Project

A. Statement of Purpose

Project PRIMES provided facilitating and direct services to the public and parochial schools in Columbus attempting to fulfill mandated evaluation requirements for meeting Ohio Standards for Elementary Schools.

One purpose of the project was to develop positive attitudes and knowledge of evaluation philosophy and techniques at the local building level. A set of procedures and instruments were devised through the efforts of the project staff to train participants to plan and carry out activities appropriate for assessing the particular educational needs in their school.

B. Procedures

Evaluation activities were implemented by a building committee formed in each elementary school in conjunction with project staff. During the year, 1972-73, the curriculum component of school operation was the state mandated area chosen for assessment. From the various content fields the school committee composed of principal, teachers and lay persons selected a focus for evaluation. Reading, the most frequent choice, was studied by 87 of the 151 participating schools.

The procedures planned for project implementation determined to some extent the amount of staff assistance to individual schools. A single briefing for the purpose of designating procedures and reviewing the instrument was required of principals who chose to carry out evaluation activities on their own. A second approach was to provide evaluation planning assistance to the building committee following the session with the principal. Finally, a procedure which assured the assistance of the project staff throughout the total schedule of evaluation activities was possible. Of the 87 schools selecting to study reading, 46 principals decided to direct the evaluation activities themselves, 19 asked for help in planning with their committees and staff, and 16 requested assistance through the total evaluation process. Reading evaluation requirements were waived in 2 schools* where pilot programs requiring evaluation were not under way. At the end of the year four schools had failed to fulfill project requirements.

During the planning meeting the committee reviewed the instrument and decided upon the sections they would use. The collection and tabulation of responses to the various sections was co-ordinated and reported according to committee specifications.

C. Instrumentation

A reading assessment instrument was provided as a basis for the committee to plan the evaluation. The six sections contained in the instrument were designed to aid the collection of information concerning student performance, teacher and administrator strengths and weaknesses, adequacy of instructional materials and parental influences in the reading program. Each committee was encouraged to implement the instrument in a manner which best served the school's interests so that the total instrument or selected sections were incorporated into the evaluation plans. Table I depicts the number of schools using each of the six sections of the instrument for evaluation purposes.

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*Thurber and Hubbard

Table I

Building Evaluation Committees Selection of
Sections of Reading Assessment Instrument

Type of Information	Number of Schools*
Pupil Performance and Attitudes	39
Teacher Strengths and Weaknesses	76
Administrator Strengths and Weaknesses	64
Adequacy of Materials	67
Parent Questionnaire	68
Factors Preventing Optimum Program	35

*The total number of schools completing evaluations of the reading program was 81.

SECTION II - Results

A. Evaluation Activities of Participants

The information gathered was intended to serve the purpose of individual schools in planning for educational improvement, thus data particular to a given school was interpreted and presented in the school's evaluation report. Results from participating schools were compiled for this report and in general present a positive view toward reading programs accross the school system.

Information is presented in relation to the various sections of the reading assessment instrument.

1. Pupil Strengths and Weaknesses

Section A of the assessment instrument listed several suggestions for gathering information about the level of student performance in reading. Building committees were not required to use this section in the evaluation design. If they did choose, one or more of the items could be selected as a basis for student assessment. There were 39 schools in which one or another of the suggestions were discussed and determined. Specific suggestions and the number of schools which reported the collection of such data are shown in Table 2.

2. Teacher Strengths and Weaknesses

Section B of the reading assessment instrument was most frequently used in reading program assessment activities.

The questionnaire was written to provide an opportunity for class room teachers to evaluate themselves. Responses were made anonymously and returned to the building evaluation committee where tallying resulted in a representative picture or "composite teacher" of reading for the school. Table 3 depicts frequency of majority responses by school. The items selected reflect teacher attitudes about themselves and depict training and experience.

Table 2

Types of Student Information Reportedly
Used to Assess Pupil Strengths and Weaknesses
in Columbus Elementary Schools.

Information Used for Assessing Students	Number of Schools
1. Comparison of grade level achievement scores with grade level potential (based on mental maturity testing)	29
2. Identification of number of under-achieving students in each classroom	32
3. Identification of specific areas of reading difficulty (e.g. meaning vocabulary as shown by standardized test printout)	28
4. Identification of specific weaknesses for individual children as shown by standardized test printout	28
5. Use of item-analysis provided for grades 4-6 to show difficulties in vocabulary or comprehension	
6. Use reading readiness test in assessment of kindergarten program	20
7. Consider pupil attitudes toward reading	5

Table 3

Frequency of Negative and Positive Responses
By School* From Teacher Self-Evaluation

Item	Number of Schools Reporting	
	Yes	No
1. Genuine interest in teaching reading	70	0
2. Training:		
a) general course in elementary teaching	69	0
b) language arts methods course	69	0
c) language arts and reading methods	67	2
d) psychology of reading	29	40
e) a reading methods course	64	1
f) children literature	68	1
g) corrective reading	18	51
h) in-service course on reading	55	14
3. Experience:		
a) class as a whole in basal reader	60	9
b) reading groups in basal reader	69	0
c) individualized reading program	56	13
d) programmed reading	20	49
e) I.T.A.	3	66
f) Linguistics	13	56
g) team teaching	15	54
h) co-operative teaching	36	33
i) departmentalized teaching	16	53
j) Joplin Plan	8	61
k) teaching machines	12	57
l) tutoring	43	26
4. Knowledge and understanding of total reading program		
a) goals	64	5
b) sequence of skill development	65	4
c) necessity of teaching individual students	67	2
d) methods	66	3
e) organizational patterns	64	5
f) evaluation	61	8
5. Rating strengths and weaknesses in teaching reading skills	Strong	Weak
a) pre-reading	46	23
b) concepts -meaning vocabulary	65	4
c) sight vocabulary	67	2
d) word attack	66	3
e) comprehension	64	5

Table 3 (Cont'd)

Item	Number of Schools Reporting	
	Strong	Weak
6. Able to diagnose strengths and weaknesses in individual students	67	2
7. Able to prescribe instruction to meet individual student needs	64	5
8. Able to evaluate program effectiveness	67	2
11. Able to co-ordinate existing reading services effectively		
a) pre-kindergarten	21	48
d) reading resource teacher	49	20
e) reading clinic	36	33
f) speech therapist	63	6
g) educational aides	50	19
h) volunteers	41	28
i) tutors	54	15
16. Read aloud to class daily	65	4

* Diocesan schools are not included in Table presentation

At 76 schools teachers responded to questions concerning their training and experiences in teaching reading. Self-evaluative responses about knowledge of various program components and instructional expertise were collected, also. For most classroom teachers, university preparation included 1) a general course in elementary teaching, 2) a language arts method course, 3) a language arts and reading methods course, 4) a reading method course and 5) children's literature. Courses not included in their training were psychology of reading and corrective reading.

Experiences in teaching reading reported by classroom teachers were 1) class as a whole in basal readers, 2) reading groups in basal readers, 3) individualized reading programs, 4) co-operative teaching and 5) tutoring.

The majority of respondents said they had had no experience with programmed reading, ITA, Linguistics, team teaching, departmentalized teaching, the Joplin Plan, and teaching machines.

Teacher responses indicated confidence in their knowledge and understanding of the total program and in their ability to instruct and evaluate in reading. Satisfaction was indicated with the results of referrals made to supportive services for pupils with problems. Efforts to co-ordinate the services of reading teachers, reading resource teachers, speech therapists, educational aides, volunteers and tutors were said to be effective. Difficulty was noted in efforts to use effectively the services of pre-school programs and reading clinics.

Based on the high number of positive responses to items 1 and 14 elementary reading programs in the schools represented would seem to expose pupils to good adult attitudes and interest in readings.

In all the schools teachers reported that they communicated with parents by note and telephone in addition to progress reports and conferences. Some teachers in all but nine schools had made home visits.

3. Administrator Strengths and Weaknesses

Implementation of the reading instrument, Section C, was accomplished by sixty building evaluation committees.

Forty-one of these schools asked the administrator to respond in a self-evaluative manner. The remaining 19 schools had teachers respond according to their impressions of the administrator. Both approaches resulted in favorable views of the principal's ability to provide leadership for the school reading program. Table 4 depicts some of the important items and the frequency of positive and negative responses to them (Parochial school data not included because of difference in compiling).

Another item in the questionnaire was concerned with reasons why pupils did not receive adequate support services.

Three types of problems were reported

1) unavailability of services because of inadequate space or facilities (waiting lists, full program, etc.)
2) complexity of referral procedures
3) unco-operative parents (difficulty of accepting problems of child).

Table 4

Frequency of Responses by Principals or Staff to Items from Section C Administrator Strengths and Weaknesses

Items	Administrators		Staffs	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
1. Knowledge and understanding of total reading program:				
a) difficulties of teaching individually	40	0	15	0
b) sequence of skills	35	6	14	1
c) methods	36	5	14	1
d) materials	35	6	14	1
e) goals	39	2	15	0
f) evaluation	38	3	12	2
g) organizational patterns	35	6	15	0
2. Leadership provided by				
a) encouraging experimentation or innovation	37	4	15	0
b) provision for material and use	40	1	14	1
c) in-service programs	31	10	13	2
d) constructive suggestions	37	4	13	2
e) flexible organizing for instruction	40	1	15	0
3. Provide assistance for teachers having problems with reading instruction	37	4	12	3
4. Coordinate existing services:				
a) reading teacher	40	1	15	0
b) speech therapist	39	2	15	0
c) psychologist	40	1	14	1
d) reading resource teachers	37	4	14	1
e) educational aides*	30	4	14	1
f) tutors	36	5	14	1
g) library aides*	27	7	10	2
h) volunteers*	32	6	13	1
i) Right to Read	20	11	7	3

* Not applicable in some schools

4. Instructional Materials

The section listing a variety of instructional materials, Section D, was incorporated in the assessment plan of 66 participating schools. Courses of study and curriculum guides as well as basic tests were said by most schools to be in adequate supply. However a large number of the schools reported that diagnostic instruments to aid in determining teaching approaches were unavailable. Diagnostic instruments for determining pupil strengths and weaknesses and materials for teaching basic skills were available to the schools. Although a few schools complained about not being adequately supplied with earphones essential to instruction for the Houghton Mifflin series-visual equipment and materials.

A majority of schools said they were not adequately supplied with paperback libraries, puppets and programmed learning materials. Included in the list of inadequate materials by some schools were workbooks and worksheets, flannel boards, magnetic boards and professional libraries. Table 5 summarizes this data.

Table 5

Number of Schools Reporting Instructional Materials to be Adequate or Inadequate

Types of Materials	Number of Schools Reporting	
	Yes	No
1. Course of study, curriculum guide	62	4
2. Basic Texts	65	1
3. Diagnostic instruments to determine approach		
a) sight	42	22
b) phonetic	41	25
c) kinesthetic	27	39
d) combination	31	35
4. Diagnostic instruments to determine pupil strengths and weaknesses	52	14
5. Materials for basic reading skills		
motor	39	14
visual (pre-reading)	55	10
auditing (pre-reading)	52	12
concepts-meaning vocabulary	59	7
sight vocabulary	60	6
comprehension	59	7
study skills	56	9
flexibility of rate	49	15
6. Basic audio-visual equipment and materials		
a) tape-recorder	58	8
b) earphones	56	10
c) movie projector	64	2
d) filmstrip projector	64	2
e) record player	62	4
f) TV	60	6
7. High Interest-low read-ability books	50	15
8. Paperback library	24	42
9. Reading games and devices	49	14
10. Puppets	28	44
11. Pictures and dictionaires	62	4
12. Reference Materials	61	5
13. Books for Recreational Reading	54	8
14. Programmed Learning Materials	34	28
15. Workbooks-Worksheets	54	12
16. Flannelboard	54	12
17. Bulletin boards	66	0
18. Magnetic boards	42	22
19. Chart paper	61	2
20. Professional library	38	25

* Totals are not consistent because of items not having responses

Table 6

Frequency of School Response to Items on Parent Questionnaire

Item	Number of Schools Responding	
	Yes	No
1. Do you read to your child?	64	
2. Did child view educational TV (i.e. Sesame Street)?	64	
3. Did you take child for community trips?	63	1
4. Did you talk about trip with him?	61	33
5. Do you read together?	62	2
6. Visit library with child?	46	18
7. Provide place for child to study?	62	2
8. Does child read to you	64	0
himself	64	0
brothers and sisters	60	4
9. Does teacher give you specific suggestions for helping your child?	61	3
10. Have you observed reading being taught in school?	24	40
11. Are you satisfied with reading program?	56	8
12. Do you know what should be taught at each grade level?	12	54
13. Do you have opportunities to express opinions and make recommendations about your child's reading program?	54	12
14. Are new reading programs explained?	37	27

5. Parent Questionnaire

Building Evaluation Committees in 64 schools sampled parent opinion in assessing the school reading program. Twenty-one of the schools asked less than 5 parents to respond to the questionnaires but the remaining 43 committees were able to obtain a picture of the typical parent in the community by sampling 10 to 250 persons with school age children. Data compiled according to smallness or largeness of sample size reflects similar attitudes of parents in the Columbus area. Disregarding sample size the majority response was taken to be representative of the particular school. Table 6 displays the outcomes by the school majority percentages.

It is noted that the above numbers refer to schools reporting majority responses. Thus data from particular schools might give somewhat different views than that presented in the chart. Project staff attempted to aid the evaluation committee in interpreting data from particular schools which might reflect parental dissatisfaction or disinterest. In several schools in which one or more of the items got many negative responses, although not necessarily a majority, attempts were made to inform parents, through special programs or literature, about those things which they did not know.

6. Factors Preventing the Development of an Optimal Reading Program.

This was an open-ended question to which thirty-five schools responded for assessment purposes. Table 7 displays the factors listed consistently by responding schools as large class size, the need for more professional and tutorial resource persons. Several schools noted the lack of libraries and listening centers. Physical space, inadequate planning and instructing time and attitudes and knowledge of professionals were listed by over half of the responding schools.

Table 7

Frequency of Factors Preventing Optimal Reading Programs

Factor	Number of Schools Listing Factor
Professional and/or tutorial resource persons	28
More and Better Materials and Equipment	27
Large Class Size	24
Libraries and Listening Centers	13
Inadequate Planning and Instructing Time	12
Attitudes and Knowledge of Professionals	11
Physical Space or Facilities	10
Student Concerns (Attendance, Mobility, Learning Difficulties and Diagnosis)	10

SECTION III - Summary and Recommendation

A. Value of Outcomes

On the whole the first year procedure and instrument provided an appropriate degree of participation for the schools fulfilling the evaluation mandate. The time required and the level of skill needed for implementing PRIMES were acceptable to elementary principals and staffs. Quite frequently follow-up activities based on evaluation outcomes were meaningfully planned and carried out at the building level. The section of the reading instrument concerning teacher strengths and weaknesses was especially useful to administrators in planning for staff development programs.

Evaluation data collected with the reading instrument tended to present a uniform picture, with emphasis on teacher characteristics and instructional materials, of programs throughout the system. Markedly different approaches and organizational patterns and the particular problems of individual schools were barely reflected in the assessment. In the few schools where comprehensive evaluations based on suggestions from the student strength and weakness section were planned, it was discovered that a great amount of time and thinking were required to collect data relevant to their questions, and to plan for appropriate changes based on the results.

B. Relevancy of Objectives

Experiences this year in assisting and facilitating evaluation activities seem to demonstrate a need for increased knowledge of and better training for evaluation on the part of many project participants. Assistance seemed essential in many schools because of the restraints of time imposed by daily administrative and instructional responsibilities. The implementation of meaningful and comprehensive evaluation designs required careful planning and scheduling. For these reasons the goal of PRIMES to provide training and assistance to individual schools fulfilling the evaluation mandate is very appropriate.

C. Recommendations

Project activities and evaluation outcomes suggest several levels of education to which recommendations might be addressed:

1a. Project Level - A recommendation for the project is that the consulting services of the project staff be more efficiently distributed to schools asking for evaluation assistance. The basis for consulting assignments should be considered in light of the amount of service requested by specific schools to accomplish evaluation activities rather than on the subject area selected for assessment. The services of one project staff member were directed toward the majority of the participating schools all choosing to focus on reading program evaluation during the initial project year. It was difficult to provide the amount of assistance needed and/or requested to realize their goals for assessment.

1b. A second recommendation directed to the project is concerned with the development of an evaluation instrument or a set of procedures which will be flexible enough to initiate evaluation activities in very diversified educational communities, but which will provide useful information to specific schools. Staff objectives for the initial project year demanded a great deal of effort in revising pilot instruments. It is recommended that these efforts be continued with systematic evaluation of the implementation of revised instruments during year two.

2. Building Level - At the building level the continuation of project activities in order to accomplish state requirements for evaluation is strongly recommended. As defined operationally by state standards, systematic evaluation is a somewhat unfamiliar process to elementary school staffs. The number of schools unwilling or unable to collect and use information concerning student achievement and aptitude is evidence of a need for further training and practice in the use and interpretation of assessment techniques. Assisting and facilitating services to increase technical and interpretive skills as well as to stimulate motivation in elementary staffs is important.

3. System Level - At the system level, it is recommended that support and encouragement be given to the efforts of individual schools to interpret and use student data for improving instruction. Section B, D, and F of the reading instrument provided information concerning staff training and in-service. These sections pointed out in different ways the need for more training in specific areas of reading instruction. Difficulties facing principals and teachers are planning, grouping and organizing for more accurately prescribed reading instruction for individual students, as well as, for particular schools. Although instructional materials were generally considered to be in adequate supply, more efficient and effective use of materials was a matter of concern. In-service programs might well be planned around these concerns.

4. State Level - The standards for elementary education in Ohio have mandated evaluation requirements that are beyond the capabilities of many elementary staffs where knowledge of and time for evaluation are involved. It is recommended that the state department of education provide some form of planned assistance to local systems in developing the necessary skills for implementing the standards.